



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Book review: Römische Reichsreligion und Provinzialreligion by H. Cancik; J. Rüpke

Citation for published version:

Sauer, E 2001, 'Book review: Römische Reichsreligion und Provinzialreligion by H. Cancik; J. Rüpke', *The Journal of Roman Studies (JRS)*, vol. 91, pp. 205-6. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3184789>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.2307/3184789](https://doi.org/10.2307/3184789)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:

The Journal of Roman Studies (JRS)

Publisher Rights Statement:

© Sauer, E. (2001). Book review: Römische Reichsreligion und Provinzialreligion by H. Cancik; J. Rüpke. *Journal of Roman Studies*, 91, 205-6doi: 10.2307/3184789

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.





Römische Reichsreligion und Provinzialreligion by H. Cancik; J. Rüpke

Review by: Eberhard Sauer

The Journal of Roman Studies, Vol. 91 (2001), pp. 205-206

Published by: [Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3184789>

Accessed: 19/12/2013 05:33

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Roman Studies*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Seleucid era ('year 279'); it begins a series of texts and documents which mirror at Dura the religious life of Palmyra itself; and it is the earliest evidence from Dura for the cult of the Babylonian deity Bel.

The later evidence, naming Bel, from sites in Dura other than this temple is by no means as extensive as might be supposed, given that the famous 'Temple of the Palmyrene Gods' in the north-west corner of the city has for long gone under the name 'temple of Bel'. But D. (294) shows, independently of the reviewer (op. cit. above), that the relevant documentary evidence, all in Greek, names as its deity Zeus: 'the temple of Zeus' would be the only justifiable name for it. Both D. and the reviewer (in *The Roman Near East* (1993)), however, missed the strong case made by T. Pekáry in 'Das Opfer vor dem Kaiserbild', *Bonn. Jahrb.* 186 (1986), 91, repr. in his *Ausgewählte kleine Schriften*, ed. H.-J. Drexhage (1994), 188, suggesting that the 'three Palmyrene deities' shown in the famous fresco of the sacrifice by the tribune Iulius Terentius are in fact statues of Roman emperors (he proposes Pupienus, Balbinus, and Gordian III). The two other deities represented are clearly labelled — the Tychai of Dura and Palmyra, that is to say the same pair who appear on the well-known reliefs from the 'sanctuary of the Gaddē' at Dura (D. ch. 4, and pls III–IV).

Other chapters discuss the cult of Nabu (in both cities) and that of Malakbel, and the volume is completed by a long Appendix discussing all the Palmyrene documentary and archaeological remains from Dura. To this minefield of fragmentary, disparate, but often very striking and evocative, material D. brings a new and extremely welcome methodological caution and sophistication, starting (xix) by distancing herself from the rather simplistic notions about 'syncretism' or 'solar henotheism' which Rostovtzeff borrowed from Cumont.

Apart from being a highly useful study of fascinating material, and, via the evidence from Dura, an important contribution to the religious history of Palmyra itself, this book offers a model of logic and clarity in approaching the confusing and contested cultural and religious history of the Near East, and should be read by all future students of the area.

Brasenose College, Oxford

FERGUS MILLAR

H. CANCIK and J. RÜPKE (EDS), *RÖMISCHE REICHSRELIGION UND PROVINZIALRELIGION*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997. Pp. x + 318. ISBN 3-16-146760-4. DM 138.

A review by Rüpke of past scholars' definitions of the central term *Reichsreligion* (imperial religion), in which he also introduces the theme of *Provinzialreligion* (provincial religion), forms the introduction to the proceedings of a conference (held in 1996 at Bad Homburg) on these very subjects. This is followed by a discussion of 'Civil religion' by Kehrer and by Bendlin's paper on 'Peripheral centres — central peripheries'. Bendlin offers a very convincing model of an 'open system' in which people exercised free choice and constantly added divinities to their local pantheon. Deities transformed while spreading through the Empire; they did not stay 'Roman'. He rightly rejects the notion that the degree of adoption of what might superficially appear to be 'Roman' deities can be used to measure the degree of approval of Roman dominion (53–4). '... A model of >integrated societies< where indigenous and supra-regional cultural patterns were not in conflict. . . further invalidates any romanization-resistance dichotomy' (57). The article is essential reading for those who maintain the latter approach.

Woolf's appraisal of the Polis-Religion model is best summarized in his own words (77): 'A more realistic (if less neat) account might aim to uncover a variety of interlinked and intersecting ordering principles, some more influential in private cult than in public, some common to both.' One has to agree with Woolf's conclusions (83) that an appreciation of the so-called 'private religion' is equally as important as Polis-Religion (i.e. public cults) and is essential for understanding the origins of change in religious practice as a whole. Woolf's article is thought-provoking, but leaves the reader with questions. He claims (75) that 'a few religions, notably Mithraism and Christianity, rejected outright some key features of ancient religion' and mentions the term 'resistance' in this context. This is certainly true for Christianity; but what evidence justifies singling out Mithraism? Woolf's source, R. Gordon (in M. Beard and J. North (eds), *Pagan Priests* (1990), 235–55), does not provide the answer. What forms the basis of Woolf's hypothesis that myth in Gaul was 'perhaps already forgotten in the Roman period' while 'neither pre- nor early Roman art in Gaul has any clear narrative element' (81)? Local coinages, incidentally, did not always disappear before the mid-first century (81) but in some regions only in the late first or second century (L.-P. Delestrée, *Monnayages et peuples Gaulois du Nord-Ouest* (1996), 73; 79; 124; 142; *Carte Archéologique de la Gaule* 28, (1994), 43); but why are coins quoted in this context? Coin images may well have reminded people of myths, but should we really think that the disappearance of Celtic coins had religious reasons or are there other examples in which the survival of myth depended mainly on coins as a medium?

Frateantonio offers an interesting paper on the degree of religious autonomy and imperial interference. I believe the concluding 'open' question (97), whether the severe Christian legislation

is merely an intensified continuation of high imperial legislation or whether it is a novelty, can be answered. Laws against temple theft are a traditional way of protecting a pluralistic religious system; an intolerant monotheistic imperial religion was indeed a complete novelty. Blomart offers a highly useful compilation and interpretation of the evidence for the rite of 'evocatio', a prayer to ask a deity (often, but not always of a hostile town) to change his or her traditional domicile and/or patronage.

Haynes discusses religion in the Roman army, but he goes far beyond the traditional epigraphy-centred approaches. He demonstrates the potential of the study of offerings in watery contexts for our understanding of the Roman army. In his diligent study he takes into account regional differences and is able to show to what degree the ritual behaviour of individual soldiers was influenced by indigenous traditions in their area of origin. He is also right in stressing that there were ritual deposits in forts (122); the aureus and the denarius embedded in the concrete floor of the *capitolium* and a similar discovery in another room of the *principia* at Aalen (D. Planck, *Archäologische Ausgrabungen in Baden-Württemberg* (1984), 156) constitute another example of this religious practice, probably linked to similar foundation deposits on the occasion of the reconstruction of the *capitolium* at Rome (Tac., *Hist.* 4.53.4). Cancik deals with representations of provinces at Rome and discusses which phenomena constitute an imperial religion (*Reichsreligion*).

Spickermann, in his knowledgeable contribution on aspects of a new regional religion in Germany, Raetia, and Noricum, stresses that, with the exception of the imperial cult and the official army religion, there is no evidence for active Roman interference with religious practice in the Celtic and Germanic area (147–8; cf. 151–2), a view which I, and presumably Bendlin (see above), would share. His scepticism (152) on the interpretation of deities as Roman or indigenous on the basis of formalistic criteria, such as whether or not they are described as *deus* or *dea* is equally well founded. Nünnerich-Asmus compiles evidence for sanctuaries in the Iberian peninsula, stressing the dominance of classical architecture which forms a contrast to Gaul, for example. Is she right in claiming that the temples were financed by indigenous sponsors as a last attempt to maintain indigenous cult besides the veneration of the new gods of Rome (183)? The strong local religious continuity of sites and the veneration of natural sanctuaries stressed by Nünnerich-Asmus make the reader wonder whether the pre-Roman elements were not more prevalent than it may appear on the surface. When she stresses that not a single Iberian name of a deity survived (183–4), it would have been worth discussing Blázquez's supposition that a few of the 320 known names of indigenous deities from the Iberian peninsula (mainly from the west and north) may be of Iberian origin (J. M. Blázquez, 'Einheimische Religionen Hispaniens in der römischen Kaiserzeit', *ANRW* II 18.1, (1986), 167–73).

Schäfer's and Diaconescu's summary of their important excavations at the Liber Pater sanctuary in Apulum in Dacia offers fascinating insights into the nature of the cult of Liber Pater and into the religious scene in Dacia which was diverse and multi-cultural even by Roman provincial standards. The native element was undoubtedly stronger in religion in Greece in the Roman period than it was in Dacia. However, it was not quite as dominant as our main source, Pausanias, would have us believe. He often glosses over foreign influences according to Auffahrt's study, which focuses on the Roman colony of Patrai. Herz offers an interesting summary of the imperial cult in the East and stresses both the local components and the aim to promote the cohesion of the Empire.

The last contribution is dedicated to the spread of Christianity. Marksches explores the question as to what degree Christianity can be called a *Reichsreligion* (imperial religion), focusing on Palestine. A codified monotheistic religion has, of course, by its very nature more unifying elements and a lesser degree of regional variation than the polytheistic religious world which Bendlin appropriately characterized as an 'open system'. Nevertheless Marksches's study, based on both textual and material evidence, shows that in Christianity there are strong regional elements. He also rightly stresses the importance of charismatic figures throughout the history of Christianity, placing particular emphasis on Julius Africanus; the latter's involvement in secular studies in the Severan period, a time when pagan education was still strongly rejected by other Christians, such as Tertullian, demonstrates the role of individuality in early Christianity. However, Marksches makes no attempt to see Christianization through the eyes of non-Christians; the survival of pagan cults in Late Antiquity and the Church's often violent endeavours to blot them out are not referred to. The destruction of the Marneion in Gaza against the will of the population (279 no. 70) or the, often unsuccessful, attempts of the Church to suppress spring veneration (Soz., *Hist. Eccl.* 2.4; Cyrillus Hierosol., *catechesis* 19.8; *Archaeology* (May/June 1995), 25) are examples of this phenomenon, the discussion of which would have helped to gain a more balanced perspective of the Christianization of Palestine.

This book contains very important contributions to the study of the religion of the Roman Empire. It will be particularly useful to those who try to identify unifying elements in the very complex religious system of the Roman world.

University of Leicester

EBERHARD SAUER